

Brave Avenue make it tough

WYCOMBE WANDERERS' final Isthmian League match at Loakes Park on Saturday was very similar to many of their other performances this term when they mixed some delightful football with their own brand of inconsistency that has frustrated their supporters all season (writes Stuart Earp).

With a full strength side out and the inspiration of avenging their 2-0 defeat at Walthamstow last September, it should have been a rousing finish to their league campaign at home. But it never really materialised.

Wycombe can say rightly they were saving themselves for Monday's Berks and Bucks Senior Cup Final against Slough. Two "Rebels" — Terry Reardon and Geoff Anthony were at Loakes Park on Friday taking a good look at the Blues. Perhaps, after all, Wanderers were luring them in to a false sense of security! Incidentally there were several hendon players watching, too, including internationals Tony Bass and Alan Phillips.

At first it seemed the fans were in for a treat when Wycombe went two up inside 30 minutes. Three minutes later Avenue lost goalkeeper John Payne with a back injury and full back Janes took over in goal.

It was a severe blow to Walthamstow and many expected Wycombe to go on the rampage. But they never really pressurised the new keeper and allowed the visitors to come back into the game with a late goal.

Wycombe 2,
W'stow A. 1

The Blues' second half performance was eminently disappointing. True, they hit the crossbar and occasionally went close but they could never match up to their first half showing and in the end were in danger of losing a point.

Oxford referee P. Knock soon clamping down on minor fouls in the first five minutes, penalised both sides regularly. It was Wycombe, however who looked the most dangerous with Johnny Hutchinson finding a lot of space on the left. "Hutch" in fact, went through his best 90 minutes since rejoining the club and deservedly notched the first goal after nine minutes.

Larry Pritchard engineered the goal when he made a couple of characteristic turns on the top wing and crossed left footed into the box. Keith Searle nodded on and Hutchinson was there to head the ball over keeper Payne's despairing dive.

John Maskell came onto the

scene in the 28th minute when he produced a superb one handed save from White. Winger John Roseman tricked Ian Rundle and crossed high into the area where Roseman headed towards the top corner. Maskell, who had originally come out for the cross changed his mind and palmed the ball out to safety.

A minute later, Wanderers were two up with one quick attack that went from one end of the pitch to the other. Paul Birdseye, who mixed some superb footwork with poor distribution, put Hutchinson through the middle and he in turn found Pritchard. Larry ran on and carefully steered the ball over the top of the advancing Payne.

It looked like curtains for the visitors when Payne went off with a back injury in the 33rd minute, with Janes taking over.

The substitute didn't come on until the 40th minute, Mick Dye moving into the forwards, winger Roseman switching to midfield and number 6 Steve Trice taking over the full back's role.

It was soon evident, however, that the setback had not deterred Walthamstow.

Wycombe lapsed into a casual frame of mind despite the promptings of John Delaney. The first half fight and enthusiasm was missing and there was never enough concerted pressure put on Janes to produce another goal.

As the minutes ticked away Avenue began to come more and more into the match, thanks to Wilson who was a real inspiration to his teammates. Alan Gane, unused substitute for two matches, came on for Tony Horseman after 78 minutes and Gane soon made his presence felt with a crashing shot that went narrowly over the crossbar after Kenny Swain had dribbled into the visitors area.

Wycombe had their moments in the second period — but they were few and far between. In one scramble Pritchard struck the underside of the crossbar from Swain's corner.

Walthamstow kept battling away at the other end, however, and their efforts were rewarded in the 86th minute when they pulled back to 2-1 with a neat goal. Trice flighted over a measured cross after Carrington had burst through on the top wing, and Dye sent a perfect header between Maskell and the upright.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; I. Rundle, D. Bullock, J. Delaney, P. Birdseye, R. Williams, L. Pritchard, J. Hutchinson, A. Horseman (sub A. Gane 78 mins), K. Searle, K. Swain.

WALTHAMSTOW: J. Payne (sub M. Dye 40 mins), M. Janes, R. Redman, T. Smith, B. Wilson, S. Trice, A. Carrington, R. Wiles, B. Jackson, P. White, J. Roseman.